

*Bede and Gregory of Tours: A Reconsideration**

From the mid-twentieth century, medievalists came increasingly to view the chronicles and histories of their era less as ‘quarries’ of historical data, and more as works of literature with distinct ‘principles of selection, emphasis or composition’.¹ Armed with this spirit of source criticism, Anglo-Saxonists set out with fresh vigour to uncover the methods and agendas that stood behind the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, written by Bede (d. 735), a monk based at Wearmouth–Jarrow in the kingdom of Northumbria.² The inclination to read the *Historia Ecclesiastica* as literature naturally prompted a new interest in the historiographical models on which Bede drew. For some, this concern arose from a desire to place ‘the father of English history’ in a more properly ‘European’ context.³ Bede’s debt to Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), the inventor of the genre of Church history, was rightly emphasised.⁴ It was also suggested that the *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*—a fifth- or

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1. R.W. Southern, ‘Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing, I: The Classical Tradition from Einhard to Geoffrey of Monmouth’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* [hereafter *TRHS*], 5th ser., xx (1970), pp. 173–96, at 173–4. Southern’s brilliant essay mentions Bede only in passing, and completely omits Gregory of Tours.

2. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969) [hereafter *HE*]; translations my own, informed by *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, tr. L. Sherley-Price, rev. R.E. Latham, ed. D. Farmer (London, 1990), pp. 19–206; J. Campbell, ‘Bede I’ (1966) and ‘Bede II’ (1968), both repr. in J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 1–28, 29–48; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, ‘Gregory of Tours and Bede: Their Views on the Personal Qualities of Kings’, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, ii (1968), pp. 31–44, esp. summary statements at 43–4; R.A. Markus, *Bede and the Tradition of Ecclesiastical Historiography* (Jarrow, 1975); R. Ray, ‘Bede, the Exegete, as Historian’, in G. Bonner, ed., *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirtieth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), pp. 125–40; G. Bonner, ‘Bede’s *Vera Lex Historiae*’, *Speculum*, lv (1980), pp. 1–21; P. Wormald, ‘Bede, the *Bretwaldas*, and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*’, and A. Thacker, ‘Bede’s Ideal of Reform’, both in P. Wormald, D.A. Bullough and R. Collins, eds, *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129, 130–53; W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History: Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), pp. 235–328.

3. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede’s Europe* (Jarrow, 1962), esp. pp. 1–2; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, 1988), esp. p. xxxiii.

4. Bede knew Eusebius through the translation and continuation of Rufinus of Aquileia (d. 411). Campbell, ‘Bede I’, pp. 4–5; ‘Bede II’, pp. 33–4, 35; L.W. Barnard, ‘Bede and Eusebius as Church Historians’, in Bonner, ed., *Famulus Christi*, pp. 106–24; Markus, *Bede*, pp. 3–4, with a note of dissent at pp. 14–15.

sixth-century jeremiad composed by the British writer Gildas and used as a source for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*—provided Bede with a providential framework, deriving ultimately from the Old Testament, within which to trace the history of his people.⁵ Others, however, judged the New Testament to be a more likely source of inspiration, proposing that Bede's work functioned as a continuation of the Acts of the Apostles, the book which charts the diffusion of the faith to the gentiles.⁶

Meanwhile, however, the question of what model, if any, Bede had available for writing a Church history focused on a specific geographical region, and indeed a specific 'people' (*gens*), remained unsolved. It was noted that one precedent existed for a work of this kind: the *Historiae* (formerly known, erroneously, as the *Historia Francorum*), written in the late sixth century by Gregory, bishop of Tours (d. 594), which traced, among other things, the growth of Christianity within Gaul and the early history of the Merovingians, the Frankish dynasty that ruled the region in Gregory's time.⁷ Wilhelm Levison proposed in 1935 that the *Historiae* represented the only possible template available to Bede for writing a Church history focused on the deeds of a particular Germanic people, before promptly adding that 'there may have been no need for a model at all'.⁸ Michael Wallace-Hadrill picked up on Levison's remark sixteen years later, reflecting parenthetically, '[I]t seems to me that Bede's debt [to Gregory] is somewhat greater [than Levison thought]'.⁹

5. Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica [hereafter MGH], Auctores Antiquissimi, XIII (Hanover, 1898), pp. 25–85, esp. 25–7, 40–41 (cc. 1, 26). For this view, see P. Wormald, 'Engla Lond: The Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vii (1994), pp. 1–24, esp. 14; P. Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede and the Church of the English', in G. Rowell, ed., *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism* (Wantage, 1992), pp. 13–32, esp. 23–8. On Gildas's use of Scripture, see M. Coumert, 'Gildas', in J. Hagner, E. Steiner and E.M. Tyler, eds, *Medieval Historical Writing: Britain and Ireland, 500–1500* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 19–34, at 28–34. For critiques of the view that Bede saw the *Angli* as a new Israel, see n. 144 below. On the Pentateuch as structural influence on the *HE*, see Ray, 'Bede, the Exegete, as Historian', esp. pp. 132–4.

6. G. Tugène, 'L'Histoire "ecclésiastique" du peuple anglais: Réflexions sur le particularisme et l'universalisme chez Bède', *Recherches augustiniennes*, xvii (1982), pp. 129–72; R. Ray, 'What Do we Know about Bede's Commentaries?', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, xlix (1982), pp. 5–20, esp. 19–20; A. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 240–49.

7. Gregory of Tours, *Libri Historiarum X*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH, Scriptores Rerum Merovingiarum, I, pt 1 (Hanover, 1951) [hereafter *Hist.*]; translations my own, informed by Gregory of Tours. *The History of the Franks*, tr. L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1974). On the name, see W. Goffart, 'From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum* and Back Again: Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours', repr. in W. Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London, 1989), pp. 255–74.

8. W. Levison, 'Bede as Historian', in A.H. Thompson, ed., *Bede: His Life, Times and Writings. Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of his Death* (Oxford, 1935), pp. 111–51, at 133; 'only the work of Gregory of Tours can have been, in this connexion, a kind of model to him, which, in spite of its wider frame, becomes more and more a history of the Franks and, at the same time, includes so much ecclesiastical matter that some manuscripts call it *Historia ecclesiastica*. But there may have been no need for a model at all'. See also *ibid.*, pp. 141, 145.

9. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Work of Gregory of Tours in the Light of Modern Research', *TRHS*, 5th ser., i (1951), pp. 25–45, at 45; Wallace-Hadrill notes further similarities at *ibid.*, pp. 26, 37–8.

Perhaps the most sustained discussion of this potential connection came in two important articles by James Campbell. Campbell suggested that Bede's idea of composing a 'national' ecclesiastical history must have owed something to Gregory of Tours who, Campbell reasoned, had done for the Franks what Bede was now doing for the English.¹⁰ But Campbell also thought that Bede departed from his Gallic predecessor in several respects. Most significantly, the Northumbrian monk was remarkably reluctant to discuss events relating to his own time, whereas Gregory frequently featured as an actor within his own narrative, and well over half of the *Historiae* addressed the period in which he served as bishop of Tours. Gregory also differed from Bede in his fulsome coverage of the scandals and miracles that occurred in his own and neighbouring dioceses, whereas Wearmouth–Jarrow scarcely features in Bede's history.¹¹ Whilst more recent scholars have followed suit in tentatively proposing connections between the two histories, they have usually understood the relations between the Gallic bishop and the Northumbrian monk in terms of contrast rather than imitation.¹² In particular, the *Historia Ecclesiastica's* focused account of the conversion of Britain, and especially the 'English', has often been contrasted with the more sprawling narrative of the *Historiae*. Robert Markus was typical in declaring that Gregory was 'at the mercy of his sources and his models and less able to dominate his materials than Bede'.¹³

Since the 1980s, Bedan scholarship has moved beyond the *Historia Ecclesiastica* to incorporate a wider focus on Bede's prodigious scientific, computational and exegetical output.¹⁴ While this work has succeeded in setting Bede's political and historical thought in a richer context, it has left unresolved some of the questions that had been raised concerning the historiographical influences behind the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.¹⁵ This is particularly lamentable given the profound

10. Campbell, 'Bede II', p. 34 ('national'). See likewise Markus, *Bede*, p. 5.

11. Campbell, 'Bede I', pp. 5, 14–15; 'Bede II', pp. 34–5. Gregory continues the *Historiae* up to 591, and appears to have added X. 31, an epilogue, in 593/4. Gregory's chronology and process of composition are debated: some views are encapsulated in the literature cited at n. 16 below.

12. Several scholars have proposed that Bede's account of Edwin's conversion was modelled on Gregory's description of the conversion of Clovis. This suggestion is based on relatively superficial likenesses, which may have resulted from similarities in missionary strategy rather than literary homage. On this point, see Wallace-Hadrill, 'Gregory of Tours and Bede', p. 39 n. 45; Markus, *Bede*, pp. 4–6, 9–10; I.N. Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, lxiii (1985), pp. 249–72, at 272 (implicitly); Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 304. For recent thematic comparisons between the two texts, see A.T. Thacker, 'Bede and History', and R. Love, 'The World of Latin Learning', both in S. DeGregorio, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 170–89, at 172–3, and pp. 40–53, at 48; R. Love, 'The Library of the Venerable Bede', in R. Gameson, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, I: c.400–1100 (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 606–32, at 628; R. Shaw, *How, When, and Why Did Bede Write his Ecclesiastical History?* (Abingdon, 2022), pp. 32, 33, 35; N.J. Higham, *(Re-)Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context* (London, 2006), p. 57.

13. Markus, *Bede*, pp. 5–6.

14. See the essays collected in DeGregorio, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Bede*.

15. For reappraisals of Bede as a historian based on his exegetical writings, see C. O'Brien, 'Kings and Kingship in the Writings of Bede', *English Historical Review*, cxxiii (2018),

reappraisal of the writings of Gregory of Tours that has taken place since the 1970s. It is now clear that Gregory was as shrewd as Bede in his manipulation of source materials.¹⁶ In particular, Helmut Reimitz's characterisation of the *Historiae* as a radicalised form of Church history can provide a springboard for scholars of early medieval Britain and Gaul to engage in a more sustained conversation about the relationship between the two authors.¹⁷

Although studies of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* continue to acknowledge in passing the possible influence of Gregory of Tours on Bede, no detailed enquiry into this connection—nor the significant further questions that it raises—has been attempted. The above-mentioned shift in focus towards Bede's non-historical writings partly accounts for this scholarly lacuna. A further explanation perhaps lies in the fact that the Merovingian period has such a poor manuscript survival rate, so that mapping the circulation of the *Historiae* is a daunting task. It scarcely helps, too, that early medieval scribes produced several abridged recensions of Gregory's text, meaning that gaining a sense of *which* version of Gregory's work Bede would have encountered presents an additional challenge. This article first engages with the manuscript transmission directly, believing that this provides the best point of departure for gauging Bede's knowledge of Gregory's writings. It contends that Bede had almost certainly *not* read the complete ten-book version of the *Historiae* that is most familiar to modern scholars, an argument that significantly undermines the value of the previous commentary on this question cited above. From that point, it presents a new hypothesis on Bede's knowledge of the *Historiae*, namely that he had seen the six-book recension that was compiled within a generation of Gregory's

pp. 1473–98; S. DeGregorio, 'Bede's "In Ezram et Neemiam" and the Reform of the Northumbrian Church', *Speculum*, lxxix (2004), pp. 1–25. A recent study that considers Bede's use of continental sources in the *HE* is W.S. van Egmond, *Conversing with the Saints: Communication in Pre-Carolingian Hagiography from Auxerre* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 90–96, 119–27.

16. Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 112–234, was a watershed. Also noteworthy: F. Thürlmann, *Der historische Diskurs bei Gregor von Tours: Topoi und Wirklichkeit* (Bern, 1974); Wood, 'Gregory of Tours and Clovis'; I.N. Wood, 'The Secret Histories of Gregory of Tours', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, lxxi (1993), pp. 253–70; K. Mitchell, 'History and Christian Society in Sixth-Century Gaul: An Historiographical Analysis of Gregory of Tours' *Decem Libri Historiarum*' (Michigan State Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1983); A.H.B. Breukelaar, *Historiography and Episcopal Authority in Sixth-Century Gaul: The Histories of Gregory of Tours Interpreted in their Historical Context* (Göttingen, 1994); K. Mitchell and I.N. Wood, eds, *The World of Gregory of Tours* (Leiden, 2002); N. Gauthier and H. Galinié, eds, *Grégoire de Tours et l'espace gaulois. Actes du congrès international (Tours, 3–5 novembre 1994)* (Tours, 1997); M. Heinzlmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century*, tr. C. Carroll (Cambridge, 2001); G. Halsall, 'The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours' Histories: Its Form, Context and Significance', *English Historical Review*, cxxii (2007), pp. 297–317; A.C. Murray, 'Chronology and the Composition of the Histories of Gregory of Tours', *Journal of Late Antiquity*, i (2008), pp. 157–96; A.C. Murray, ed., *A Companion to Gregory of Tours* (Boston, MA, 2015). For my own contribution, see J. Merrington, 'The Building Projects and the Histories of Gregory of Tours', *Early Medieval Europe*, xxx (2022), pp. 159–84.

17. H. Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity, and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550–850* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 25–124.

death. I propose that this shorter text helped Bede to define the shape and scope of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

I

It can be proven beyond doubt that, by the end of his life, Bede knew at least one passage from the *Historiae*.¹⁸ In his *Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum*, Bede quotes a sentence from Gregory's work (found at *Historiae*, Book V, Chapter 34) as a source on the symptoms of dysentery, lightly adapting Gregory's original:

Georgius [that is, Georgius Gregorius Florentius] mentions this illness in book five of his *Historiae*: 'In the time of the emperor Tiberius the illness dysentery took over nearly all of Gaul. Those who were afflicted had a great fever with vomiting and awful pain in the kidneys, heaviness of the head or of the neck; and the stuff that was projected from their mouths was yellow, or at any rate green. It was declared by many that some secret poison was to blame; and in fact the herbs which are curative to poisons, taken as drink, brought relief to many'.¹⁹

We should, naturally, guard against assuming from this single cross-reference that Gregory's work functioned as a model for the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Levison argued, for example, that the *Retractatio* may only have been composed after Bede had completed his historical work.²⁰ Max Laistner, however, pointed out that Bede's account of his own writings at the end of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* lists *two* books of commentary on the Acts of the Apostles. Given that Bede's earlier commentary on Acts is presented as one book in all its surviving manuscripts, we can reasonably conclude that Bede did list the *Retractatio* among his writings when he completed the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.²¹

We also have some reason to believe that Bede did *not* know Gregory's *Historiae* when he composed his *De Temporum Ratione* in 725. In the lengthy *Chronica Maiora* that he inserted into that work, Bede does

18. First noted by A.S. Cook, 'Bede and Gregory of Tours', *Philological Quarterly*, vi (1927), pp. 315–16.

19. 'Meminit hujus morbi et Georgius in libro Historiarum suarum quinto, ita dicens: "Temporibus Tiberii imperatoris dysentericus morbus pene totas Gallias praecoccupavit. Erat enim in his qui patiebantur valida cum vomitu febris renunquae nimius dolor, capitis gravedo, vel cervicis; ea vero quae ex ore projiciebantur colore croceo, aut certe viridia erant. A multis autem asserebatur venenum occultum esse; sed herbae quae venenis medentur, potu sumptae, plerisque praesidia contulerunt": *Retractatio*, in *Beda Venerabilis Expositio Actuum Apostolorum et Retractatio*, ed. M.L.W. Laistner (Cambridge, MA, 1939), pp. 93–148 (c. 28). See *Hist.* V. 34. The location of this event in the time of Emperor Tiberius is not in Gregory's original text—but Bede need only have looked at *Hist.* V. 30 to find this information. Both *Hist.* V. 30 and V. 34 feature in the 'B' recension (on which see n. 36 below).

20. Levison, 'Bede as Historian', p. 132.

21. Laistner, *Expositio et Retractatio*, pp. xiii–xvii. Roger Ray posited that the *Historiae Ecclesiastica* and *Retractatio* may have been 'concurrent projects', given that Bede's historical work clearly owes much to his meditation on the Acts of the Apostles; see Ray, 'What Do we Know', pp. 19–20, quotation at 19.

not exploit Gregory as a source for Frankish history, whereas he had been happy to incorporate Spanish materials from Isidore of Seville's *Chronicle* alongside information drawn from histories such as Orosius's *History against the Pagans* and Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*; he also describes Valentinian III as the last emperor of the western Roman empire, when a glance at the *Historiae* would have enabled him to add the short-lived Emperor Avitus to his list of emperors.²²

We can be confident, therefore, that Bede knew *something* of Gregory's history by the time he finished his own, and we can plausibly infer that his encounter with that text came sometime after 725. While Bede is traditionally thought to have finished the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in 731, scholarly opinion has recently shifted towards viewing his composition of that work as a protracted process that perhaps only came to an end as late as 735, the year of his death.²³ Through a fine-grained analysis of the text's narrative, particularly Books I and II, Richard Shaw has argued that we can discern Bede's preoccupations changing as he encountered new materials and as political circumstances shifted.²⁴ Much of Shaw's reconstructed chronology rests on dating the visits of the London-based priest Nothelm, who twice brought source materials to Bede that came to be included in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*—the first time bearing documents from the Canterbury archives, and the second time letters from the papal *scrinium* in Rome.²⁵ Although the letters from the papal archive appear to have reached Wearmouth–Jarrow sufficiently early in the process for Bede to have had time to absorb them and fit them into his narrative proper, Shaw nonetheless believes that the Northumbrian monk had 'a substantial draft' ready prior to the arrival of these writings, claiming that a skeleton narrative of Books I and II can still be discerned if the supposedly papal letters are removed from the text.²⁶ Based on a comparison between the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Bede's *Chronica Maiora* (completed in 725), Shaw argues that Nothelm brought Bede the papal letters *before* 725, in time for their contents

22. See *De Temporum Ratione*, in *Beda Opera Didascalica*, ed. C.W. Jones (3 vols, Turnhout, 1977), ii, pp. 241–544, at 517–18 (c. 66, entry for 4410). Bede's source here is the *Chronicon* of Marcellinus Comes (see *Bede. The Reckoning of Time*, tr. F. Wallis [Liverpool, 2004], p. 222 n. 634). Compare with *Hist.* II. 11: at the end of the chapter Thorpe translates *Martianus* as 'Maiorianus', though it is more likely that Gregory was referring to the Constantinopolitan Emperor Marcian. On the dating of *De Temporum Ratione*, see *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, pp. 434–5, 441, 331 (cc. 49, 52, 54).

23. Especially Shaw, *How, When, and Why*; Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 242 n. 36; P. Kirby, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum: The Contemporary Setting* (Jarrow, 1992); P. Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great* (Jarrow, 1964). For the debate on the putative allusion to the Battle of Tours or Poitiers (732/3) see Shaw, *How, When, and Why*, pp. 141–2.

24. Shaw, *How, When, and Why*, pp. 57–181.

25. On these visits, see the preface to *HE*.

26. Shaw, *How, When, and Why*, p. 57 ('substantial draft'); pp. 60–63, 76–81 (on the 'pre-papal letter draft'); pp. 63–72 (on Bede's integration of the materials). Shaw here reprises the argument of Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, pp. 8–13, but allows for more extensive redrafting following Nothelm's second visit.

to be integrated into the *Chronica*.²⁷ At this point, Bede would have restructured the first two books and added materials from those letters to the pre-existing text.²⁸ This in turn leads Shaw to the conclusion that Abbot Albinus of Canterbury had already asked Bede to write a Church history as early as the mid-710s, and that Bede had produced much of what became the *Historia Ecclesiastica* before 725.²⁹

Stimulating though Shaw's reconstruction is, some of the inferences on which it is based can be questioned. Integrating lengthy chunks of correspondence into his text was always going to disrupt the flow of Bede's narrative, especially where he was reconciling different kinds of sources that sat in tension with one another; the fact that parts of Books I and II can be read continuously even if the letters are removed might simply reflect the challenges that verbatim citation presented, rather than proving that a full draft had already been composed. Alternatively, it remains possible that Nothelm's second visit—as well as any putative redrafting that followed—occurred later than 725. In contrast to Shaw, Meyvaert had previously argued that the composition of the *Chronica Maiora* (in 725) pre-dated Nothelm's second visit to Northumbria, because in that text Bede appears not to distinguish between Augustine's two missions to Canterbury, in 596/7 and 601—information that he would have subsequently gleaned from papal documents and integrated into the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.³⁰

Shaw is undoubtedly right to propose a prolonged writing process, but we can be less certain that Bede had from the beginning conceived of the prospective work as a Church history of Britain. Bede was clearly researching Augustine's mission to Kent and the subsequent conversion of the *Angli*, as well as the history of Wearmouth–Jarrow, in the period before 725.³¹ We have strong reason to believe, however, that Bede had not yet settled on the scope of the work—nor, potentially, its title—during the early drafting stages. It seems clear, for example, that Bede had once envisaged that the *Historia Abbatum* (his biographies of the abbots of Wearmouth–Jarrow) would form part of this embryonic history; the final version of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* includes an allusion to material from the *Historia Abbatum* as if it were part of its own integral

27. Shaw, *How, When, and Why*, pp. 57–90, with helpful table at p. 88.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 70: Shaw proposes a 'substantial reconception', speculating a shift from four books to five books at this stage.

29. Shaw's reasoning for proposing that Bede and Albinus were already in contact via Nothelm in the mid-710s involves too many stages to be summarised here: *ibid.*, pp. 81–9. That Albinus initially inspired Bede is noted in the preface to *HE*.

30. *De Temporum Ratione*, ed. Jones, p. 523 (c. 66, entry for 4557). See Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, pp. 11, 23 n. 32. Shaw (*How, When, and Why*, pp. 72–6) argues the contrary based on Bede's allusions to papal letters in the *Chronica Maiora*; but summaries of the letters, or even the letters themselves, could have formed part of the *monumenta litterarum* (see *HE*, preface) relating to Gregory's disciples that Nothelm brought from Canterbury on his prior visit.

31. *Pace* Shaw, *How, When and Why*, pp. 91–139, who argues that Bede's earliest concern was to promote the authority of Canterbury (and Rome) in relation to the Easter controversy, assuming that this was Canterbury and Wearmouth–Jarrow's key agenda in the mid-710s (when, by Shaw's dating, Bede first met Nothelm).

text, strongly suggesting that the two works only became separated late in the composition process.³² The eventual division of the two works thus reflected a shift in orientation towards a Church history of Britain and the *Angli*, within which excessive emphasis on Bede's home monastery would have been inappropriate.³³ In sum, although we can accept Shaw's broad contention that Bede's work was many years in the making, the nature of the work clearly shifted throughout its gestation. Prior to his encounter with Gregory's *Historiae* (probably after 725), Bede's project may have been yet to assume the character of an ecclesiastical history charting the origins and growth of the Church in Britain, the moral condition of its people in the century that followed, and the (still incomplete) victory of orthodoxy across the island.

There is nothing inherently surprising about the fact that Bede knew Gregory of Tours's *Historiae* at the time of writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. There is not space here to recount in detail Wearmouth–Jarrow's significant continental connections: suffice to say that the *Historiae* could easily have been among the books that the abbots Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrid brought back from one of their journeys to the Continent. Indeed, the most likely candidate is surely John the Arch-cantor, abbot of St Martin, Tours, who visited Jarrow loaded with books in the late seventh century.³⁴ It is also worth noting that the *Historiae* were popular in the seventh and eighth centuries: five Merovingian copies are extant, an impressive total given the poor rates of manuscript survival from the period.³⁵ The picture is complicated, however, by the fact that these early manuscripts were all copies of a significantly shorter variant of Gregory's original text, which had been composed within a generation of his death in 594. This version, which Bruno Krusch called the 'B' recension, omits the final four books of the *Historiae* entirely, as well as excising about a quarter of the material from the first six books.³⁶

32. Bede writes at *HE* IV. 18 [16] that Benedict Biscop has been already mentioned (*cuius supra meminimus*), which must be an allusion to the *HA*. Similar cross-references are identified by Shaw, *How, When, and Why*, pp. 79–80.

33. For two other explanations of Bede's eventual exclusion of the *HA* material, see Levison, 'Bede as Historian', p. 145; Shaw, *How, When and Why*, pp. 80–81. Shaw (pp. 76–7) dates the completion of the *Historia Abbatum* to 717/18, based on its lacking elements from the anonymous *Vita Ceolfridi* (see 'Introduction' in Bede, *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, ed. and tr. C.W. Grocock and I.N. Wood [Oxford, 2013], at pp. xviii–xxii, who argue for 716). Shaw (p. 77) willingly admits that this amounts to an argument *ex silentio*. Even if Bede finished writing the *HA* by 717/18, this would not prove that he had yet ruled out integrating it into the eventual *HE*.

34. See Bede, *Historia abbatum*, ed. and tr. Grocock and Wood, *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, pp. 21–76, at cc. 5–6, and *HE* IV. 18 [16]. See also P. Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (London, 1970), pp. 155–94. On Bede's library, see M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 35–7; Love, 'Library'.

35. On the manuscripts, see B. Krusch, 'Die Handschriftlichen Grundlagen der *Historia Francorum Gregors von Tours*', *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, xxvii (1934), pp. 673–757; P. Bourgain and M. Heinzmann, 'L'œuvre de Grégoire de Tours: La diffusion des manuscrits', in Gauthier and Galinié, eds, *Grégoire de Tours*, pp. 273–317; Reimitz, *History*, pp. 133–59.

36. That 'B' was the work of a subsequent redactor was decisively proven by Walter Goffart, reprising Thierry Ruinart's observations in the seventeenth century: Goffart, 'From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum*'. For the chapters omitted from 'B', see Reimitz, *History*, pp. 145–54. There is

The differences between the 'A' and 'B' versions of the *Historiae* will be treated in greater detail below, but what matters for the purposes of this discussion is that the single quotation that Bede recorded from Gregory's *œuvre* can be found in the shortened 'B' recension, as well as Gregory's original ten-book text (Krusch's 'A'). Aside from the survival of the Merovingian manuscripts, there are other indications that the 'B' recension was widely known in Bede's day. The anonymous authors of the 'Fredegar' *Chronicle* (composed between 640 and 658/60) and the *Liber Historiae Francorum* (composed between 726/7 and 736) used the 'B' recension in writing their respective works.³⁷ It is also significant that one of the 'B' copies, dated to the late seventh century, is thought to be three generations removed from the original 'B' manuscript.³⁸ Although the full text of the *Historiae* was certainly in circulation (fragments of one Merovingian copy survive), the ten-book version must have been significantly less well known than its truncated counterpart: it only survives in full in one manuscript dated to the late eleventh century, Montecassino Biblioteca della Badia 275 (Krusch's A1).³⁹ It is also possible, though unlikely, that Bede saw a different, but still incomplete, redaction of the *Historiae*—Krusch's 'C' and 'D' recensions—but these are not attested in the manuscript record until the very end of the eighth century and the tenth century respectively.⁴⁰ Lastly, we cannot rule out that Bede took the quotation from a compendium that included passages from the *Historiae*—but no such manuscript survives from earlier than the ninth century, and none that has been identified includes *Historiae* V. 34.⁴¹

One final observation can be made relating to the manuscript tradition, although it can be no more than suggestive. In the earliest surviving manuscripts of the *Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum*, Gregory is described (in the passage cited above) using his *praenomen*, *Georgius*.⁴² The surviving complete manuscript of the *Historiae* (A1) opens with the words 'Incipit praephatio historie ecclesiastice', and neither the incipit to Book I nor the concluding explicit names the author. The manuscript

one variation within the 'B' stemma which is unimportant for our purposes: B3, B4 and B5 have two chapters from Book VII (VII. 7–8) appended to the end of Book IV: P. Bourgain, 'The Works of Gregory of Tours: Manuscripts, Language, and Style', in Murray, ed., *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, pp. 141–88, at 146–8.

37. Bourgain and Heinzelmann, 'L'œuvre', pp. 283–4; the author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* appears to have known a longer recension too, but preferred to follow 'B'.

38. B5 (BnF, MS Latin 17655, late seventh century): Bourgain and Heinzelmann, 'L'œuvre', p. 279 (for whom this observation has a different significance).

39. On this manuscript, see Bourgain and Heinzelmann, 'L'œuvre', pp. 277–8, noting that three fragments survive from a Merovingian 'A' manuscript.

40. See Bourgain and Heinzelmann, 'L'œuvre', pp. 283–91. 'C' and 'D' are both significantly fuller than 'B' and so must derive from 'A'.

41. On this fragmentary tradition (Krusch's 'E' stemma), see Bourgain and Heinzelmann, 'L'œuvre', pp. 300–310; Krusch, 'Grundlagen', pp. 732–41.

42. M.L.W. Laistner, 'Bede as a Classical and a Patristic Scholar', *TRHS*, 4th ser., xiv (1933), pp. 69–94, at 78–9.

does, nonetheless, contain Gregory's autobiographical statement in the epilogue, in which the author identifies himself: *ego Gregorius*.⁴³ In short, the surviving 'A' manuscript at no point gives Gregory's *praenomen*, *Georgius*.⁴⁴ Turning to the Merovingian 'B' manuscripts, only two preserve their opening incipits intact. The incipit preceding the preface to Gregory's work in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France [hereafter BnF], MS Latin 17655 (Krusch's B₅, produced at Corbie in the late seventh century) begins 'Incipit praefatio Gregorii episcopi Toronensis ecclesiae', but the much fuller incipit to Book I reads: 'In Christi nomine incipit Greorgi (*sic*) Flo[rentii sive] Gregorii Turonensis episcopi historiae aeclesiasticae liber primus capitulatio'.⁴⁵ Its explicit, in turn, reads: 'Explicit liber VI Georgi Florentis sive Gregori Turonensis episcopi deo gratias'.⁴⁶ Cambrai, Bibliothèque Municipale, M 624 (Krusch's B₁, dated to the late seventh or early eighth century) opens with the words 'Gregorii praefatio prima incipit', but unfortunately its title for Book I is no longer legible and its final explicit is lost.⁴⁷ Although incipits can vary within manuscript stemmas, it is noteworthy, at least, that BnF, MS Latin 17655 (B₅) identifies Gregory first as *Greorgius* (a scribal error) and later *Georgius*, just as Bede did, whereas Montecassino 275 (A₁) transmits a stemma that entirely omits Gregory's *praenomen*, possibly signifying that its exemplar did likewise. Furthermore, the fact that BnF, MS Latin 17655 (B₅) introduces Gregory's work as 'Historia ecclesiastica' reflects how some of Bede's contemporaries understood the 'B' recension of the *Historiae*.

II

Setting aside the manuscript evidence, the next stage of this analysis investigates whether Bede's work bears any signs of dependence on Gregory's *Historiae* as a historical source.⁴⁸ The obvious points at which Bede might have drawn on material from the *Historiae* are so few that they can be dealt with quickly. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* is relatively focused in its geographical coverage: it tells the story of the coming of Christianity, in its orthodox 'Roman' form, to the island of Britain, with special focus on the peoples to whom Bede, at times, gave the

43. *Hist.* X. 31.

44. For incipits to the general preface in the manuscripts, see *Hist.*, p. 1 (lines 22–6). (A thirteenth-century hand added *domini Gregorii Turonensis archiepiscopi* to A₁.) For the incipits to Book I, see *Hist.* p. 1 (lines 41–3). For explicits to Book X, see *Hist.*, p. 537 (lines 20–22).

45. BnF, MS Latin 17655, fos 2r (incipit to first preface), 3r (incipit to Book I). It can be viewed on Gallica: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84527667/f13.item.zoom> (accessed 3 Aug. 2024). For dating and discussion, see Reimitz, *History*, p. 140.

46. BnF, MS Latin 17655, fo. 96v; *Hist.*, p. 321 (lines 33–5).

47. *Hist.*, p. 1 (lines 41–6). Reimitz (*History*, p. 140) says B₁ was 'roughly contemporary, possibly slightly later' than B₅.

48. On Bede's method in using earlier writers as sources, see Shaw, *How, When, and Why*, pp. 26–9.

collective appellation ‘Angli’.⁴⁹ Bede had little interest in Gaul for the purposes of writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*—indeed, as noted below, he may have had an interest in tacitly suppressing Frankish involvement in the story he was trying to tell. Gregory of Tours, for his part, took even less interest in Britain than Bede did in Gaul, as we shall see. There are also important points of difference in the two authors’ chronological coverage. Gregory’s narrative only continues up to 591, while Bede’s narrative proper only begins with Augustine’s mission to Canterbury, in 597.⁵⁰ There was thus little factual material in the *Historiae* that Bede would have found useful in writing his concise twenty-two-chapter epitome of British history up to that date, and although points of common ground naturally exist between Bede’s and Gregory’s summaries of earlier Roman history, these can be accounted for by their reliance on shared sources.⁵¹

If we wish to find points of overlap, we could note, first, that in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as in his *Chronica Maiora*, Bede identified the death of Valentinian III as the moment at which the western Roman empire ended, whereas he could have added the Emperor Avitus to his narrative with the aid of the *Historiae*.⁵² But, given Bede’s tight focus from the very start of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* on Britain’s place within the Roman empire, and given the brevity of Avitus’s rule, he could have omitted Avitus deliberately. After all, the statement was essentially accurate from the perspective of Britain; Bede would have read in Gildas that the Britons made their final appeal to the imperial centre in the third consulship of Aetius, under Valentinian’s rule.⁵³

Another moment where Bede might have sought to draw upon Gregory comes in his treatment of Bertha, the Merovingian princess who married King Æthelbert of Kent. The two texts describe this event very differently. Gregory twice reports, very briefly, that an unnamed daughter of King Charibert and Queen Ingoberga married the son of a king of Kent and went to live there.⁵⁴ Bede either did not know, or did not care, about Bertha’s parentage: he records rather circumspectly that, before Augustine’s mission, a Frankish princess named Bertha came to Kent accompanied by a Bishop Liudhard, and that her parents had demanded that she be allowed to practise Christianity freely as a condition of her marriage to Æthelbert.⁵⁵ Bede’s failure to fill out his

49. On Bede’s use of the term ‘Angli’, see n. 139 below.

50. *HE* I. 23.

51. For Gregory’s reliance on Orosius see *Hist.* I. pr, 6, 41, V. pr; on Bede’s, see D. Scully, ‘Bede, Orosius and Gildas on the Early History of Britain’, in S. Lebecq, M. Perrin and O. Szerwiniak, eds, *Bède le Vénérable: Entre tradition et postérité* (Lille, 2005), pp. 31–42.

52. ‘cum quo simul Hesperium concidit regnum’: *HE* I. 21. See n. 22 above.

53. Gildas, *De Excidio*, ed. Mommsen, p. 36 (c. 20). On Bede’s use of Gildas, see P. Sims-Williams, ‘The Settlement of England in Bede and the “Chronicle”’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, xii (1983), pp. 1–41, at 5–26.

54. *Hist.* IV. 26 (included in the ‘B’ recension); IX. 26.

55. *HE* I. 25.

account of Bertha with the (very limited) information he could have derived from the *Historiae* can be accounted for in several ways. First, since Gregory does not name the princess or the man she married, it is possible that Bede might not have made the connection (indeed, it is conceivable, though surely unlikely, that Gregory and Bede were talking about two separate events).⁵⁶ More pertinently, it is well known that Bede was concerned to foreground a Romano-centric narrative of conversion. Undue focus on Bertha would expose the unwelcome possibility that Æthelbert's decision to convert had been influenced by Frankish political pressures prior to 597.⁵⁷

Having addressed these two minor cases in which Bede could not, or would not, make use of the *Historiae*, it will be necessary to discuss at greater length the two authors' treatments of Pope Gregory the Great. The fact that Bede made no use of the remarkable account of Gregory the Great's papal consecration contained at the start of Book X of the *Historiae* appears to confirm that he did not have access to the full, ten-book version of that work at the time of writing the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.⁵⁸ Gregory the Great, in Bede's eyes, was the apostle of the *Angli*; one of his primary concerns in composing the *Historia Ecclesiastica* was to foreground a genealogy for 'English' Christianity that started with him.⁵⁹ The historical value of *Historiae* Book X, Chapter 1 would surely have been apparent to Bede, as will become apparent if we compare the two authors' treatments of Pope Gregory.⁶⁰

In 590 one of Gregory of Tours's deacons, Agiulf, had gone to Rome in order to collect relics. He lingered in the city so that he could witness the papal inauguration, and passed on his report to the bishop of Tours. Agiulf's account, as retold by his superior in the *Historiae*, can briefly be summarised. We read that plague had struck Rome, and that its very first victim had been Pope Pelagius II. The Roman citizens at once elected as Pelagius's successor the deacon Gregory, a man of senatorial pedigree, well educated in the liberal arts, who had already endowed six monasteries in Sicily and a seventh in Rome itself. As deacon, Gregory had been conspicuously unmaterialistic: he dressed humbly, and often gave alms. As a result of his extreme fasts, vigils and prayers, he had developed a stomach condition. Despite being the people's choice as Pelagius's successor, Gregory was so keen to avoid the honour that he wrote to Emperor Maurice (whose son he had baptised) begging to

56. The latter possibility raised by R. Shaw, *The Gregorian Mission to Kent in Bede's Ecclesiastical History: Methodology and Sources* (London, 2018), pp. 81–2 n. 68.

57. I.N. Wood, 'The Mission of Augustine to the English', *Speculum*, lxxix (1994), pp. 1–17, esp. summary statement at 16.

58. This chapter's authenticity was challenged by O. Chadwick, 'Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1, no. 197–8 (1949), pp. 38–49. For decisive riposte, see Heinzelmann, *Gregory*, pp. 76 n. 76, 80 n. 83.

59. 'quia etsi aliis non est apostolus, sed tamen nobis est': *HE* II. 1. See Campbell, 'Bede I', pp. 22–4; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 306–7, 309.

60. For what follows, see *Hist.* X. 1.

be excused. However, the prefect of Rome, Germanus, intercepted the letter and replaced it with another beseeching that Gregory be made pope. The emperor warmly acquiesced. Gregory of Tours next quotes the new pope's lengthy address to the people of Rome verbatim, in which he urged them to conduct a collective penance in order to assuage the disease that was afflicting them. The penitential activity involved visiting the city's foremost holy sites and co-ordinating a chant of the *Kyrie eleison*. Agiulf reported that during this remarkable performance eighty people dropped dead, but the pope carried on undaunted.

We can now compare Bede's one-chapter summary of Pope Gregory's life contained in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.⁶¹ Gregory was the son of Gordian and a descendant of Pope Felix II. Although he had held secular office, he swapped the worldly *habitus* for monastic garb. Gregory only accepted the office of bishop reluctantly; he went into hiding in the hope of avoiding consecration. Gregory had lamented that the pastoral office distracted him from purely spiritual pursuits, although Bede hastily interposed that the man lost none of his monastic perfection after assuming the papal office. Gregory had previously served as a papal legate in Constantinople, but while there had kept up his monastic lifestyle as well as composing the *Moralia in Job* and a treatise against the Eutychian heresy. Bede then lists his other writings, noting that this intellectual output was all the more remarkable given that Gregory was often worn out by gastric pain and chronic fever. He was also generous to the poor; rather than building and adorning churches, he generously gave alms and focused on his pastoral duties. Bede next quotes Gregory's epitaph in full, before finally relating how the pope sent missionaries to Britain, including the famous vignette that he first became inspired to do so when he saw a group of young boys—*Angli*—in the market, who looked to him rather like angels.

Pope Gregory was so central to Bede's narrative that he was prepared to include a good deal of material about him in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that was not strictly relevant to the conversion of Britain: his pedigree, his writings, his time in Constantinople as legate, his illnesses, his battles with heresy, his liturgical reforms, his (lack of) building projects in the city of Rome, and his epitaph. The sources for Bede's account appear to be the brief *vita* that he knew from the *Liber Pontificalis*, and the autobiographical content that he found in Pope Gregory's own writings. The points of overlap with Gregory of Tours's account are clear, but can be explained through reference to these other sources.⁶² The *Liber Pontificalis* describes the pope's breeding and his secular career path. That he lived monastically and wrote the *Moralia in Job* in Constantinople can be found in the preface to that very work. Pope

61. For what follows, see *HE* II. 1.

62. For this and what follows, see Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, pp. 4–7. Whether Bede knew the Whitby *Life of Gregory the Great* is irrelevant here.

Gregory laments that episcopal office was a distraction in the prefaces to his *Moralia* and the *Dialogi* and mentions his illnesses in the preface to his *Cura Pastoralis*. Finally, the *Libellus Synodicus* notes that Gregory turned his papal household into a monastery.

Nonetheless, Bede fails to mention various details from Gregory of Tours's account of the papal consecration that would surely have suited his purposes. First, Bede's admiration for Pope Gregory's commitment to the monastic lifestyle might have been enhanced by the knowledge that the young man had brought on his stomach pains through zealous prayer and fasting. That his predecessor, Pelagius, had died of plague, and that Gregory's first act as bishop was to shepherd his flock through this public health emergency with a courageous programme of penance would have surely strengthened Bede's portrayal of Gregory's humility and pastoral concern. The deacon Gregory's failed attempt to avoid election as pope might likewise have helped Bede to underscore his reputation for reluctance in accepting office.

Most significantly, Gregory of Tours knew that Pope Gregory was, in fact, a rather prodigious patron of monasteries, having founded seven in total. This rather contradicts Bede's claim that the pope favoured almsgiving and the shepherding of souls over adorning and building churches: here Bede is following the *Liber Pontificalis*, which does not mention any of Pope Gregory's monastic endowments (although it does mention adornments that he gifted to St Peter's).⁶³ Admittedly, it could be argued that Bede had reason to emphasise the pope's frugal way of life so as to lend support to the reform agenda which has been identified as one of the *Historia Ecclesiastica's* key concerns.⁶⁴ But he would surely have been pleased to think of Gregory as a promoter of the kind of communal monasticism of which Lindisfarne and his own Wearmouth–Jarrow were exemplars.⁶⁵ It therefore seems telling that Bede shows no sign of familiarity with the remarkable eyewitness account of the pope's consecration provided by Gregory of Tours, especially if we contrast Paul the Deacon's enthusiastic use of *Historiae X. 1* in composing his *Vita Gregorii Magni* in the late eighth century.⁶⁶

At this stage, we should recall that Bede could only have seen *Historiae X. 1* if he had had access to a ten-book version of that text.⁶⁷ The foregoing discussion hence demonstrates that whilst Bede certainly knew the *Historiae* in some form at the time of writing the *Historia*

63. Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory*, p. 6.

64. Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform'; DeGregorio, 'Bede's "In Ezram et Neemiam"', extends this argument to Bede's exegetical writings.

65. See Bede's famous description of Lindisfarne: *HE III. 3*.

66. For example, Paul the Deacon, *S. Gregorii Magni Vita*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, LXXV (Paris, 1849), cols 41–60, cc. 4 (seven monasteries), 5 (illness due to asceticism), 11–12 (quotes verbatim from the accession speech). Paul may have encountered a now-lost 'A' manuscript at Lorsch; see Bourgain and Heinzlmann, 'L'œuvre', pp. 277–8; Krusch, 'Grundlagen', pp. 706–8.

67. The 'A' and 'D' recensions contain *Hist. X. 1*.

Ecclesiastica, he is very unlikely to have known the ten-book work that Gregory himself authored. Having cleared up some important misconceptions that have hampered previous scholarly enquiries, the remainder of this article will argue that Bede *had* read the ‘B’ recension and that this rather different variant on the *Historiae* exerted an influence on the shape and scope of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

III

A note of caution must be sounded before comparing Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* with the ‘B’ recension of Gregory’s *Historiae*, primarily because the thematic and structural character of both texts undoubtedly owes something to a common model, Rufinus’s Latin translation and continuation of Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*.⁶⁸ For good reason, scholars have argued that where Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* displays the traits of a Church history, direct influence from Eusebius-Rufinus should be assumed. The fact that both Gregory and Bede’s works incorporate verbatim transcriptions of documents, for example, tells us little about Gregory’s possible influence on Bede, given that this was an integral feature of the Eusebius-Rufinus model; the fact that both texts record martyrdoms, heresies and episcopal successions can also be attributed to the influence of Eusebius-Rufinus.⁶⁹ The comparison must therefore proceed first by clarifying the nature of the ‘B’ recension as a particular variant on the genre of Church history. As such, we should begin by analysing how ‘B’ differs from Gregory’s original work.

Both the structure and the purpose of the ten-book ‘A’ recension of the *Historiae* have been subjects of significant scholarly contention since the 1980s, and there is insufficient space for a full review of these debates here.⁷⁰ The first book of the *Historiae* essentially traces the origins in biblical and Roman history of the conflict between the good and the wicked, which Gregory had flagged as a major theme in his general preface.⁷¹ Already by the end of Book I, however, the narrative largely narrows to the political and ecclesiastical life of Gaul. From midway through Book IV, Gregory covers events that occurred during his time in office as bishop. From Book V onwards, the political events of each year are recorded in considerable detail, and for this

68. On Bede’s knowledge of Eusebius, see n. 4 above. For the argument that Eusebius was Gregory’s primary model, but that he adapted the Eusebian genre in important ways, see Reimitz, *History*, pp. 44–50, and H. Reimitz, ‘Genre and Identity in Merovingian Historiography’, in H. Reimitz and G. Heidemann, eds, *Historiography and Identity, II: Post-Roman Multiplicity and New Political Identities* (Turnhout, 2020), pp. 161–204, at 166–81.

69. A. Momigliano, ‘The Origins of Ecclesiastical Historiography’, in A. Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 132–52, at 136–8 and 141–3.

70. See the literature noted at n. 16 above.

71. On Gregory’s selective interest in the history of the western Roman empire, see S.T. Loseby, ‘Gregory of Tours, Italy, and the Empire’, in Murray, ed., *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, pp. 462–97, at 471–7.

reason these books have been described as ‘annalistic’.⁷² Throughout the *Historiae*, meanwhile, Gregory intersperses his account of political and ecclesiastical history in Gaul with local and personal subject matter: on one estimate, the bishop himself features in one quarter of the chapters from Books V to X.⁷³ The accessions and activities of the bishops of Tours and Clermont (Gregory’s native region) receive close coverage, while ‘capsule biographies’ of holy people in Tours and the surrounding regions appear recurrently; in effect, Gregory embedded a history of his episcopal and home dioceses into a wider-framed history.⁷⁴ Many of the local stories that Gregory records relate to people who can be identified as members of his own family.⁷⁵ Some of the local affairs that Gregory described, however, can hardly be called ecclesiastical, such as an infamous feud between two citizens of Tours, or the murder of a Jewish man and his servants at the hands of the vice-count of Tours, Injurius.⁷⁶ In four of the first five books of the *Historiae*, Gregory’s prefaces play an important role in instructing the reader to understand the narrative as a continuation of earlier writings (both biblical and post-biblical) charting the conflict between the holy and the sinful that he considered to be ongoing within secular time; this framing firmly places those books within the tradition of ecclesiastical history. The final five books, however, lack any prefaces at all, meaning that the reader has to work harder to retain this interpretative focus. Of course, all the stories that Gregory includes serve in some way to demonstrate the presence of God in human affairs, but by the very end of the *Historiae* the themes that had loomed so large in these early books—the advance of Christianity and the eradication of heresy in Gaul—are now largely left behind, without explicitly being superseded by new ones.⁷⁷ When Gregory came to write his epilogue, his concern was to set down the history of his own diocese and to outline his literary legacy.⁷⁸ Whereas Bede would survey the spiritual condition of Britain in the recapitulation to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Gregory preferred to focus on local concerns.⁷⁹

72. Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 182 *inter alia*.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

74. For example, notices of bishops: *Hist.* I. 44, 45, 46, II. 1, 14, 16, 21, 22, 26, 39, III. 2, 17, IV. 7, 15, 35; holy people in the surrounding region: *Hist.* I. 37, IV. 32, 33, 34, 37, V. 7, 21, VI. 6, 7, VIII. 15–16; X. 29. For the hypothesis that Gregory was motivated to write the *Historiae* by the need to consolidate institutional memory following fires at the cathedral in Tours and Saint Martin’s basilica, see Merrington, ‘Building Projects and the *Histories*’.

75. For example, *Hist.* III. 15, 19, IV. 5, 35, 36, V. 5, X. 6.

76. *Hist.* VII. 47, IX. 19; see also *Hist.* VII. 23.

77. On Gregory’s desire to show the presence of the divine in worldly affairs, see Goffart, *Narrators*, esp. summary statement at pp. 173–4.

78. *Hist.* X. 31.

79. Some have argued that Bede’s recapitulation of time and autobiographical note owe themselves to *Hist.* X. 31: this is both unnecessary, as Bede certainly knew other precedents, and unlikely, since the respective epilogues differ significantly. See Levison, ‘Bede as Historian’, p. 132, and Higham, (*Re-*)*Reading Bede*, pp. 11–12.

Turning to the six-book 'B' recension, it can first be noted that, because the annalistic Books VII to X (covering events from 580 to 591) are absent, the narrative has a rather more focused feel, as a general preface and prefaces to Books I, II, III and V guide the reader's interpretation of the events described. The sixty-eight chapters that are excised from Books I to VI overwhelmingly relate to churchmen or saints from the bishopric of Tours and neighbouring dioceses, and include the vast majority of those that feature Gregory himself as an actor.⁸⁰ To pick a few examples, we lose a story about two chaste lovers in Clermont; a capsule biography of Bricius, bishop of Tours; a multi-chapter account of a disputed episcopal election in Clermont; the murder of Gregory's brother, Peter, who had been a deacon in Langres; and the account of Gregory's trial at Berny-Rivière.⁸¹

Since the 'B' recension of the *Historiae* is probably unfamiliar to scholars who are not specialists in the work of Gregory of Tours, it will be worthwhile to offer a brief, and admittedly somewhat selective, summary of its narrative. An opening general preface notes that although some are currently persecuting churches, others are generously endowing them; and although the Christian faith is weak in some, it is strong in others.⁸² It is immediately followed by the preface to Book I, which signals that the work will record the conflict between martyrs and pagans, and churches and heretics; the author records the Nicene creed, asserting in no uncertain terms his confessional status.⁸³ In the main text, readers of the 'B' recension encounter first a gloss on biblical history, before reading (albeit in somewhat abbreviated form) of the anti-Christian policies of the pagan Roman emperors.⁸⁴ We also encounter the names of the seven men who founded Gaul's earliest bishoprics in the cities of Tours, Arles, Narbonne, Toulouse, Paris, Clermont and Limoges.⁸⁵ The life of Martin of Tours, Gregory's saintly predecessor, who is said to have reignited the spiritual lamps of Gaul, is described.⁸⁶

The preface to Book II asserts that the blessed and wicked have always coexisted, justifying this work's commingling of the two by reference to biblical precedent. Following Martin's death, 'many heresies assaulted God's churches, most of which were subjected to divine vengeance'.⁸⁷

80. Notices in Books I–VI relating to the bishopric of Tours omitted from 'B': *Hist.* II. 1, 14, 26, 39; IV. 11, 15; V. 6–7; VI. 10, 13. Notices relating to bishops, monasteries or confessors in dioceses bordering Tours omitted from 'B': I. 44–6; II. 15–17, 21–3, 36; IV. 5–7, 12, 19, 32–7, 48; V. 9–10, 12; VI. 9, 15, 22, 29, 36–7, 39. The chapters that are kept featuring Gregory as actor are *Hist.* V. 18, 43–4, 50; VI. 5.

81. *Hist.* I. 47; II. 1, IV. 6–7, 11–12, 15; V. 5, 48–9.

82. *Hist.* general preface.

83. *Hist.* I. pr.

84. Roman persecutors: *Hist.* I. 26–7, 30, 32.

85. *Hist.* I. 30.

86. *Hist.* I. 39, 48.

87. 'Multae enim heresis eo tempore Dei ecclesias impugnabant, de quibus plerumque ultio divina data est': *Hist.* II. 4.

We read that the Arian Visigoth Euric ‘brought a grave persecution against the [Nicene] Christians in Gaul’: he beheaded, imprisoned and exiled his confessional opponents, and blocked entry to their churches.⁸⁸ Once the Frankish king Clovis submits to baptism, he engages in a religiously motivated war against the Visigoths.⁸⁹ Following his victory at Vouillé, most of the provinces of Gaul are brought under Nicene rule, although the Visigoths still occupy Narbonne, one of its ancient dioceses. The preface to Book III makes Clovis an exemplar of Nicene virtue in contrast to the heretical Alaric. Clovis’s sons and grandsons continue to make war on Arian peoples who occupy parts of Gaul—the Visigoths, the Burgundians and the Ostrogoths—as well as peoples beyond its old frontiers, such as the Thuringians and the Saxons.⁹⁰ Although civil wars between Frankish kings proliferate and are at times recounted in a decidedly bleak tone, miracles still abound.⁹¹

In Books V and VI, these civil wars continue; in the preface to Book V the narrator decries the avarice of Clovis’s grandsons, a lament that is echoed later in the same book by words that Gregory places in the mouth of Queen Fredegund, who is reportedly convinced that her sons’ death betokens divine anger at her and her husband’s rapacious tax policies.⁹² Meanwhile, examples of extreme piety persist among churchmen such as Germanus of Paris and Avitus of Clermont, or confessors such as St Hospicius.⁹³ Troubling signs of heresy continue to surface, but are successfully rebuffed: a dispute over the dating of Easter arises, on which the narrator offers his opinion; the Visigothic Queen Goiswinth instigates a persecution of Nicene Christians, including a Frankish princess, Ingund.⁹⁴ The possibility that the Visigothic kingdom might abandon its heretical ways is raised on several occasions: Hermanegild, son of the Visigothic king Leuvigild, and Ingund’s husband, is persuaded to convert and leads a pro-Nicene rebellion in the Visigothic kingdom (although his actions are presented rather ambivalently); a Visigothic ambassador suggests to Gregory that Leuvigild has made some steps towards the Nicene position, albeit in bad faith.⁹⁵ Efforts are made to convert the Jewish communities

88. ‘Euarix rex Gothorum ... gravem in Galliis super christianis intulit persecutionem’: *Hist.* II. 25. Gregory exaggerated the violence of Euric’s persecution; see E. James, ‘Gregory of Tours, the Visigoths and Spain’, in S. Barton and P. Linehan, eds, *Cross, Crescent and Conversion: Studies on Medieval Spain and Christendom in Memory of Richard Fletcher* (Leiden, 2007), pp. 43–64, at 46–8.

89. *Hist.* II. 37. There has been significant debate concerning the date of Clovis’s baptism. For a punchy intervention, see D. Shanzer, ‘Dating the Baptism of Clovis: the Bishop of Vienne vs the Bishop of Tours’, *Early Medieval Europe*, vii (1998), pp. 29–57.

90. *Hist.* III. 10, 21 (Visigoths); III. 6, 11 (Burgundians); III. 32 (Ostrogoths); III. 4, 7–8 (Thuringians); IV. 14 (Saxons).

91. *Hist.* IV. 47, 49–51 (bleak fratricidal conflict); IV. 49 (Martin restores peace).

92. *Hist.* V. 34. See Halsall, ‘Preface to Book V’.

93. *Hist.* V. 8 (Germanus); V. 11 (Avitus); VI. 6 (Hospicius).

94. *Hist.* V. 17 (Easter); V. 38 (Visigoths).

95. *Hist.* V. 38, VI. 18, 43 (Hermanegild); VI. 18 (Leuvigild). On the problems with Gregory’s treatment of these events, see James, ‘Gregory of Tours, the Visigoths and Spain’, pp. 56–7, 59.

of Gaul, with some success.⁹⁶ King Chilperic, however, seems to present a roadblock against the conversion of the Visigoths (with whom he unsuccessfully attempts to broker a marriage alliance) and the Jews (whom he ham-fistedly attempts to force into baptism), while imperilling orthodoxy at home with idiotic interventions into Church doctrine.⁹⁷ The 'B' recension closes with Chilperic being murdered and condemned as an archetype of Nero or Herod.⁹⁸

In the years since the 'B' recension was correctly identified as an abridgement of Gregory's longer work, the intentions of its redactor have been much debated. Walter Goffart argued that the aim was to produce a legitimately 'Frankish' history, noting that most of the chapters excised from the text relate to churchmen.⁹⁹ Adapting Goffart's reading, Martin Heinzelmann observed that the redactor's elimination of chapters relating to ecclesiastical politics was far from uniform, and suggested that the redactor had selected on the basis of chapter *headings* alone, so that a good deal of ecclesiastical material still snuck into the eventual 'B' recension.¹⁰⁰ This explanation seems insufficient, however, since Gregory's treatment of St Martin of Tours was retained entirely; likewise, the entirety of Book III, containing several 'capsule biographies' of holy people, was kept.¹⁰¹ Recently, Reimitz has questioned the notion that the redactor intended to produce a more 'Frankish', less 'ecclesiastical' work.¹⁰² For one thing, separating 'ecclesiastical' from 'secular' contents within the *Historiae* is near-impossible, given that, as Gregory himself often signalled, his entire work mingles side-by-side the virtues of the just and the depravities of the unjust. Gregory did not imagine the Church as a discrete institution, but as a community present from Creation through to the End Times; and he concomitantly understood its conflict with the unjust as an ongoing motif of temporal history, with persecutors adopting many guises (such as pagan emperors, the heresiarch Arius or the Visigoth Alaric II).¹⁰³ If the redactor had intended to produce a 'national' history, we might have expected him to add new materials relating to the ethnic origins of the Franks: Gregory's account of the origins of the Franks at *Historiae* II. 9, however, was preserved essentially intact.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, as we have seen, it

96. *Hist.* V. II, VI. 5 (with less success).

97. *Hist.* VI. 45 (marriage); VI. 17 (forced baptism of Jews); V. 44 (Chilperic's bad theology).

98. *Hist.* VI. 46. For contrasting views on the role of this chapter in the *Historiae*, see G. Halsall, 'Nero and Herod?', in Mitchell and Wood, eds, *World of Gregory of Tours*, pp. 337–50, and Wood, 'Secret Histories'. Some 'B' manuscripts conclude with *Hist.* VII. 7–8 (see n. 36 above). Fredegar, who only knew the 'B' recension of the *Historiae*, observed that Gregory's narrative (as he knew it) ended with Chilperic's death: see Fredegar, *Chronicarum libri IV*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH. *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, II (Hanover, 1888), IV, prologus.

99. Goffart, 'From *Historiae* to *Historia Francorum*', pp. 269–74.

100. Heinzelmann, *Gregory*, pp. 198–201.

101. Martin: *Hist.* I. 39, 48.

102. Reimitz, *History*, pp. 159–65.

103. *Hist.* III. pr.; Heinzelmann, *Gregory*, esp. pp. 160–72.

104. A copying error led the compiler of 'B' to add the name of an early Frankish king called Valentinus, with little consequence: Reimitz, *History*, p. 138.

is suggestive that the two surviving incipits for the 'B' recension call the work *Historiae* and *Historia Ecclesiastica* respectively—the title *Historia Francorum* was a much later coinage.¹⁰⁵ In view of these considerations, Reimitz proposed that the redactor's concern was rather to create a Church history less encumbered by the web of personal and ecclesiastical connections that heavily influenced Gregory's choice of subject-matter in the original text. He hence argued that the 'B' recension was produced in the context of the Columbanian movement of the seventh century, which sought to supplant Gregory's vision of Gaul's spiritual topography by promoting saints and monasteries of its own.

The motivations of the redactor—who was presumably under pressure to find ways to shorten the long and complex original work—may always remain something of a mystery. Even so, Reimitz's reading of 'B' as an ecclesiastical history largely decoupled from Gregory's personal concerns has considerable mileage, as well as suggestive implications for the argument presented here. Goffart's reading was not entirely off the mark either, however: it is notable that, of the eighty-seven uses of the term *Francus/Franci* in the full 'A' version of Gregory's text, sixty-four can be found in the 'B' recension, meaning that the new redaction, deliberately or otherwise, accentuated the role of the Franks within a work that had been essentially halved in size.¹⁰⁶ As I shall argue below, the redactor succeeded in creating a work that foregrounded the advance of Nicene Christianity within Gaul, a process within which the Franks were assigned a carefully circumscribed role.

IV

We are now in a position to compare Bede's work with the 'B' recension, to see how likely it is that the latter influenced the form of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. We should consider first the geographical scope of the texts. As we have seen, 'B' starts with the widest possible frame by giving its own gloss on the biblical Creation story as well as Old and New Testament history; in narrative terms, this segment introduces the reader to the core themes that define the whole text—the conflict between those who represent the Church and its enemies. The focus quickly tightens, however. At *Historiae* I. 18, in discussing Julius Caesar,

105. The earliest manuscript featuring this title (Namur, Bibliothèque municipale 11 [Musée archéologique]) is tenth-century, and also, coincidentally, contains Bede's *HE*: Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 120 n. 39.

106. Reimitz, *History*, p. 57, offers a calculation on occurrences of *Francus/Franci* in Book II. I count eighty-seven uses of *Francus/Franci* (including chapter headings, not including variants on *Francia*) in the full 'A' text. The full 'A' text has 443 chapters, of which, by my count, 234 are omitted in 'B'. On Gregory's use of ethnic terminology, see G. Halsall, 'Transformations of Romanness: The Northern Gallic Case', in W. Pohl, C. Gantner, C. Grifoni and M. Pollheimer-Mohaupt, eds, *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities* (Berlin, 2018), pp. 41–57, at 46–7, 53–6.

the text notes the foundation of Lyons, a city soon to be ennobled by Christian martyrs; soon after, the seven primitive dioceses of Gaul are founded. From these cities the faith was spread ‘through all of Gaul’ (*Galliis per omnibus*): the *Galliae* provide a loose but consistent geographical focus for the narrative that follows.¹⁰⁷

Whether the later annalistic books of the *Historiae* can convincingly be called ecclesiastical history is an open question, but it is certainly true that the six-book text can be understood as an ecclesiastical history of Gaul. Whereas Eusebius-Rufinus’ history had styled itself as ‘universal’, drawing on the Virgilian equation of the Roman empire with the entire world, ‘B’ focuses on a specific set of provinces within the former Roman empire; whereas Eusebius-Rufinus had closely identified the growth of the Church with the patronage of Christian Roman emperors of the fourth century, ‘B’ gives an autonomous priority to the Church in Gaul over any specific political regime. Shortly after their foundation, the seven dioceses of Gaul enter a kind of golden age in the time of Martin of Tours. But already by the end of Book I they have fallen into the hands of persecuting heretics. Four of these dioceses are then returned to Nicene hands after Clovis’s victory over Alaric II at Vouillé. Although the preface to Book III declares that Clovis crushed heresy through all of Gaul, this is not strictly true: the three other cities remained in Arian hands for many decades after Clovis’s death.¹⁰⁸ The lingering presence and proximity of heresy (along with, to a lesser extent, Judaism) remains one of the most persistent themes that the producer of the ‘B’ recension retains, as the summary presented above demonstrates.¹⁰⁹ In other words, the conversion of Gaul to Christianity and the propagation of Nicene orthodoxy within its territories—which remained a work in progress in 584, when the narrative of ‘B’ dries up—provide a thematic coherence to the text. This complements and competes with another narrative focus: the failure of the discordant Frankish rulers of the mid sixth century to live up to the Christian example of Clovis. Gregory’s anxiety about the Franks’ moral slide is expressed most forcefully in the preface to Book V, and remains unrelieved when the ‘B’ recension draws to a close.

Turning to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede’s preface addresses King Ceowulf, and promises to record the ecclesiastical history of the *gens Anglorum*. Noting Ceowulf’s especial interest in the deeds of his own

107. *Hist. I. 30*: Reimitz, *History*, pp. 52–7. Compare Breukelaar (*Historiography*, pp. 210–26), who notes that the geographical frontiers of Gregory’s *Galliae* were vague and did not always conform to the blueprint provided at *Hist. I. 30*. Nonetheless Breukelaar (like Reimitz) argues that the *Galliae* were the key geographical unit around which Gregory organised his narrative.

108. Gregory seems to have considered Narbonne, which remained in the hands of the Visigoths (who only converted to Nicene Christianity in 587), a borderline case; see Breukelaar, *Historiography*, pp. 214–15.

109. It has rightly been noted that Gregory’s preoccupation with Arianism wanes in Books VII–X; see I.N. Wood, *Gregory of Tours* (Bangor, 1994), pp. 34–5.

people and concern for those granted by God to his protection, Bede states that the work recounts the deeds of good and bad men to provide examples for readers to imitate or avoid. The remainder of the preface details Bede's sources. The initial subject-matter of Bede's work is far narrower than Gregory's: it opens with an idealised geographical description of Britain and Ireland.¹¹⁰ The Roman conquest of Britain is noted, and Britain has become Christian already by Chapter Four.¹¹¹ Bede recounts the martyrdoms of Christians under the pagan emperors and Constantine's Peace of the Church, but by chapter eleven the Romans have gone home.¹¹²

Following their departure, Bede records that Britain slides into heresy and sinful behaviour, using Gildas as his source.¹¹³ For Bede, these events provide the backdrop for the providential arrival of the 'Angles or Saxons'.¹¹⁴ He is prepared later to call the *Angli* a people whom 'divine piety' foresaw would come to the faith.¹¹⁵ But Bede's narrative is as much concerned with Britain as a geographical expression as it is with the *Angli* as a people: in closing the text, he calls it 'an ecclesiastical history of Britain, and especially of the English people', and in his list of works describes it as 'an ecclesiastical history of our island and people in five books'.¹¹⁶ Bede's narrative foregrounds the geographical expression *Brittaniae* (a term he uses interchangeably with *Brittania*) ahead of any particular ethnic group.¹¹⁷ His interest in Ireland as a geographical space is rather less sustained, but he presumably thought it necessary to include a description of Ireland at the start of the work so as to provide context for the subsequent role that Irish monks played in the religious life of Britain, as exemplified most clearly in the communities of Iona and Lindisfarne. Similarly, Bede's interest in the religious lives of *all* the linguistic groups inhabiting Britain reflects his historiographical concern with the island as a whole.¹¹⁸ The penultimate narrative chapter of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* describes Wearmouth–Jarrow's instrumental role in bringing the Picts over to the Roman practices of Easter and tonsure, and the story closes with Iona's submission to Roman practice, an event that took place six years after those of the preceding chapter.¹¹⁹ After this, Bede finishes by surveying the confessional status of each

110. *HE* I. 1.

111. *HE* II. 2–4.

112. *HE* I. 6–8.

113. *HE* I. 8, 10.

114. *HE* I. 15. See Gildas, *De Excidio*, ed. Mommsen, pp. 38–9 (c. 23), on the arrival of the *Saxones*.

115. *HE* I. 22.

116. 'Historia ecclesiastica Britanniarum, et maxime gentis Anglorum'; 'historiam ecclesiasticam nostrae insulae ac gentis in libris v': *HE* V. 24. The discussion here owes much to Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 228–309. See also Tugène, 'L'histoire "ecclésiastique"', pp. 131–46.

117. Both terms refer to the island of Britain.

118. *HE* I. 1 (linguistic summary).

119. *HE* V. 21, 22.

part of Britain in his own time—including the lands of the British, of the Picts and of the Irish inhabiting northern Britain.¹²⁰ The *Historia Ecclesiastica* thus charts the arrival of Christianity to Britain in the Roman era, its lapse into heresy and immorality in the post-Roman era, and finally the incremental return of orthodox Christianity from the time of Augustine's mission in 597 onwards. This project remains incomplete, however, due to the obstinate commitment of the *Brettones* to the Irish dating of Easter.¹²¹ Bede's notion of *Brittaniae* or *Brittania* thus provides a geographical unity to his work that resembles the *Galliae* in the 'B' recension of the *Historiae*.

Against this backdrop of steady ecclesiastical development, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* nonetheless registers some anxieties about the moral condition of Britain in its final two books: Coldingham minster burns down owing to the unrepentant wickedness of its inhabitants; King Egfrid of Northumbria dies in battle at *Nechtansmere*, a fitting punishment for his unjust invasion of Ireland—'henceforward the hope and virtue of the kingdom of the *Angli* began to waver and to slip backwards ever further'; visions of diabolical punishment seem to signify the sinfulness of the age.¹²² Bede also closed his summary of the confessional state of Britain by sounding a note of ambivalence about the tendency of soldiers to take up monastic vows.¹²³ When read alongside Bede's *Letter to Egbert*, these concerns can readily be interpreted as a criticism of the monasticism of his own day, which, to Bede's mind, fell short of the apostolic standards set by Augustine's community at Canterbury, or Aidan's community at Lindisfarne.¹²⁴

Both the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the 'B' recension of the *Historiae*, then, chart an essentially progressive story about the growth of the Church within a specific post-Roman territory, but each work expresses concern in its later books that moral standards are disintegrating amid this time of prosperity. In the preface to his *Vita Malchi* (probably written in 388), Jerome had sketched the outline of a history that would demonstrate how, following the golden ages of the apostles and of the martyrs, the Church had been materially enriched but morally impoverished under its Christian emperors.¹²⁵ Within both the Church histories here under review, Jerome's (unrealised) vision of an essentially declinist ecclesiastical history seems to sit in creative tension with a more positive narrative arc derived from Eusebius-Rufinus.

120. *HE* V. 23.

121. Noted in *HE* V. 23. Bede used *Brettones* to refer to the British-speaking inhabitants of western Britain, whom he distinguished from the *Picti* and *Scotti* of northern Britain.

122. *HE* IV. 25 [23] (Coldingham); IV. 26 [24] (*Nechtansmere*: 'ex quo tempore spes coepit et virtus regni Anglorum fluere ac retro sublapsa referri'); V. 12–14 (visions).

123. *HE* V. 23.

124. Bede, *Epistula ad Egbertum*, in *Venerabilis Bedae Opera Historica*, I, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford, 1896), pp. 405–23. See nn. 64 and 65 above.

125. Jerome, *Vita Malchi*, in *Trois vies de moines: Paul, Malchus, Hilarion*, ed. E.M. Morales (Paris, 2007), p. 186 (c. 1. 3). Cited in Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 227.

Alongside the importance of the geographic expressions *Galliae* and *Brittaniae* to both authors, it is worth also comparing the role that the 'B' recension and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* assign to migrating peoples. Turning to *Historiae* II. 9, we read that the Franks supposedly came first from Pannonia, that they colonised the banks of the Rhine, and that they established long-haired kings in the cities of Thuringia. The names of King Theodomer and his son Ricimer are offered, as well as Chlodio and Merovech, Clovis's putative great-grandfather and grandfather respectively. We find a brief and colourful account of the life of Childeric, Clovis's father—another pre-Christian Frank.¹²⁶ One chapter recounts the idolatrous practices of the Franks (based entirely on biblical sources), but heralds their future adoption of Christianity: 'This generation of Franks did not understand at first, but they understood later, as the following history relates'.¹²⁷ Although Clovis's troops are not consistently called *Franci*, Book II of the 'B' recension clearly emphasises a broad-brush contrast between the 'Arian' Visigoths and the orthodox Franks.¹²⁸ Thereafter, however, the prominence of the Franks diminishes, and the Franks are never described as a people chosen by God.

Providential significance is explicitly ascribed on several occasions to Clovis, however. Speaking of Clovis's victories, the 'B' recension of the *Historiae* relates: 'every day God subjected [Clovis's] enemies under his hand and augmented his kingdom, for he walked with a just heart before Him and did things that were pleasing in His eyes'.¹²⁹ Clovis is closely identified not only with the cause of Nicene orthodoxy in a specifically Gallic context, but more broadly with the side of justice in its eternal struggle against the persecutors of the Church. We read that Clovis tells his troops on the eve of war with Alaric II: 'it distresses me that these Arians hold a part of Gaul (*partem ... Galliarum*). Let us go with God's help and, by defeating them, restore the land to *our* dominion'.¹³⁰ Since the Franks had never ruled the Visigothic parts of Gaul before, Gregory could only have been referring to the rightful restoration of *Nicene* rule to those portions of Gaul that had been heinously brought under Arian control. The preface to Book III, meanwhile, presents Clovis's victory over Alaric as a timeless lesson on the contrasting fates of those who embrace the Trinity and those who reject

126. *Hist.* II. 12, 18, 19.

127. 'Haec autem generatio Francorum non intellexit primum; intellexerunt autem postea, sicut sequens historia narrat': *Hist.* II. 10.

128. Although Reimitz (*History*, pp. 56–7) rightly notes Gregory's relative unwillingness to call Clovis's troops 'Franks', it is notable that *Hist.* II. 35 records that the Gauls wanted the Franks as masters ('multi ... ex Galleis habere Francos dominos summo desiderio cupiebant'). See also the passage cited at n. 130 below.

129. 'Prosternebat enim cotidie Deus hostes eius sub manu ipsius et augebat regnum eius, eo quod ambularet recto corde coram eo et faceret quae placita erant in oculis eius': *Hist.* II. 40.

130. "'Valde molestum fero, quod hi Arriani partem teneant Galliarum. Eamus cum Dei adiutorium, et superatis redeamus terram in ditone nostra": *Hist.* II. 37.

it: 'Clovis having confessed this [Trinity] crushed the heretics with its help and spread his dominion through all Gaul; Alaric, denying it, lost his kingdom, his people and, most importantly of all, eternal life'.¹³¹ The preface to Book V, finally, addresses the discord and lust for riches that had engulfed the Merovingian rulers in the two generations after Clovis; it exhorts them instead to follow the good example of Clovis in rejecting greed and internal strife in favour of wars directed against 'harmful peoples' (*noxiae gentes*), a phrase that has been shown to allude to the fact that Clovis had warred against heretics and pagans.¹³²

These observations are not intended to suggest that the 'B' recension turned Gregory's work into an ecclesiastical history 'of the Franks', nor to imply that Clovis is its central protagonist. To the extent that the Frankish people have a role to play in the ecclesiastical history of Gaul, it only begins after Clovis has submitted to baptism. Far more important in the 'B' recension is the Gallic ecclesiastical infrastructure that preceded their conquest of Gaul. Nor would it be accurate to say that the Franks were the only people in whom 'B' displays interest: the text also traces the (albeit abortive) steps that the Burgundian and Visigothic royal families made towards accepting the Nicene position.¹³³ Once converted to Christianity, the Franks play a useful, but carefully delimited, role in the eradication of heresy from Gaul.

Bede undoubtedly placed greater weight on migratory peoples than the 'B' redactor had placed on the Franks.¹³⁴ Famously lamenting the failure of the Britons to preach to the 'Angles or Saxons' after their arrival, Bede relates that 'divine piety did not abandon the people whom it foreknew, since it destined for that aforementioned race much more worthy heralds of truth, through whom they would believe'.¹³⁵ At that stage Bede had already offered his memorable description of the three groups that came to Britain: the *Angli*, *Saxones* and *Iutae*, who derived from separate, vaguely defined, provinces on the Continent.¹³⁶ He traces the origins of each of the kingdoms of his own day from these three peoples.

131. 'Hanc [Trinitatem (understood from previous sentence)] Chlodovechus rex confessus, ipsus hereticos adiutorium eius opprasset regnumque suum per totas Gallias dilatavit; Alaricus hanc denegans, a regno et populo atque ab ipsa, quod magis est, vita multatur aeterna': *Hist.* III. pr.

132. See P. Wynn, 'Wars and Warriors in Gregory of Tours' *Histories* I–IV', *Francia*, xxviii (2001), pp. 1–38, at 2–6.

133. *Hist.* II. 34; VI. 18.

134. The historicity of Bede's account of the migration is nowadays generally rejected. On the challenges of writing the history of fifth-century Britain, see J.M. Harland, *Ethnic Identity and the Archaeology of the Adventus Saxonum: A Modern Framework and its Problems* (Amsterdam, 2021).

135. 'Sed non tamen diuina pietas plebem suam, quam praesciuit, deseruit, quin multo digniores genti memoratae praecones ueritatis, per quos crederet, destinauit': *HE* I. 22. I translate *memoratae* with the more neutral 'aforementioned', where Sherley-Price (p. 72) prefers 'For He remembered them'. See W.T. Foley and N.J. Higham, 'Bede on the Britons', *Early Medieval Europe*, xvii (2009), pp. 154–85 at 169–71, for an alternative reading.

136. *HE* I. 15. The *Angli* are from 'Angulus', the 'Saxones' from the 'regio ... Antiquorum Saxonum', and the 'Iutae' are placed in the 'provincia Iutarum', which is otherwise unspecified.

Despite Bede's assertion that the continental migrants were predestined to receive the Word, recent scholarship has argued that Bede tended on the whole to draw upon Scriptural notions of divine favour and punishment in fluid, non-determinist ways.¹³⁷ Outside the sections of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that depended on Gildas, Bede tended to avoid attaching providential significance to collective groups, preferring instead to offer examples of divinely favoured individuals.¹³⁸ Moreover, on close reading, Bede's account of 'English' origins proves surprisingly incoherent. Since Bede attached multiple meanings to the term *Angli*, it is unclear whether Hengist and Horsa—the descendants of Woden to whom he assigned some form of leadership at the time of migration—were the heads of just one of the migrating peoples or of all three.¹³⁹ Although the Kentish royal genealogy that Bede later cites traced a lineage back to Hengist (but not Woden), in *Historia Ecclesiastica* I. 15 he had suggested that the men of Kent were descended from the *Iutae*, rather than the *Angli*. To add to the confusion, Bede's East Anglian genealogy only reaches back to a certain Wuffa, and the earliest Northumbrian king that he records is Ida; neither of these Anglian kingdoms appears to trace its origins to the line of Woden.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, Bede seems in *Historia Ecclesiastica* V. 9 to contradict his description of the origins of each of the three migrating groups by suggesting that the Angles or Saxons were descended from a whole host of continental ethnic groups. The ethnic terminology deployed at *Historia Ecclesiastica* I. 15 has, in fact, proved so hard to square with the rest of the text that some have considered the passage concerning the Angles, Saxons and Jutes not to be Bede's own words.¹⁴¹

The net effect of Bede's treatment of the migrating peoples was hence to show that before Augustine's mission the English-speakers could only be described through multiple ethnonyms, thereby undermining any unitary notion of 'Englishness' prior to 597.¹⁴² In fact, other than references to their places of origin, the *Angli*, *Saxones* and *Iutae* are denied any pre-migration history. Moreover, despite his belief that the

137. Regarding Bede's exegetical works, see O'Brien, 'Kings and Kingship'; on the *HE*, see Tugène, 'L'Histoire "ecclésiastique"', at pp. 146–72, with summary statement at 167–8, and Markus, *Bede*, pp. 14–15.

138. Campbell, 'Bede II', p. 38. Compare Wormald, '*Engla Lond*', pp. 12–14.

139. On the context of Bede's use of *Angli*, see I.N. Wood, 'Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Anglian Northumbria', in G. Heydemann and H. Reimitz, eds, *Historiography and Identity*, II: *Post-Roman Multiplicity and New Political Identities* (Turnhout, 2020), pp. 297–318; N. Brooks, *Bede and the English* (Jarrow, 1999), pp. 11–12; Thacker, 'Bede and History', pp. 184–5; G. Molyneaux, 'The Old English Bede: English Ideology or Christian Instruction?', *English Historical Review*, cxxiv (2009), pp. 1289–1323, at 1296–1302.

140. Kent: *HE* II. 5; East Anglia: *HE* II. 15; Northumbria: *HEV*. 24.

141. E. John, 'The Point of Woden', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, v (1992), pp. 127–34, at 129–30, argues that Bede lifted this passage from a Canterbury source. Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 300, considers Bede's account of the migration 'an atonal cacophony of different historical voices'.

142. Brooks, *Bede and the English*, pp. 14–15.

migrants arrived over a century before Augustine, Bede did not dedicate so much as a chapter to the lives that the migrants led immediately after settling in Britain.¹⁴³ This could partly be attributable to a lack of source material, but Bede could have used his regnal lists to sketch such an account. His striking reluctance to valorise the early history of English-speakers suggests that his interest in that people was strictly bounded within the limits provided by the Acts of the Apostles—in other words, that he considered the *Angli* after whom he entitled his work one people among the many to whom the faith had been destined to spread.¹⁴⁴ Bede's subsequent recounting of the *Angli's* missionary efforts in Frisia was probably intended to demonstrate that this world-historical process was still unfolding.¹⁴⁵ Bede therefore viewed the conversion of the inhabitants of Britain as one aspect of a universal story that implicitly encompassed the conversion of Gaul as well.

The foregoing discussion has compared the well-known narrative of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* with the excerpted 'B' recension of the *Historiae*. Both works focus on a province that was Christianised in the Roman era, but that subsequently fell under the sway of peoples who were pagan (Bede's *Angli* and Gregory's Franks) or heretical (Gregory's Visigoths and Burgundians and Bede's *Brettones*, Picts and Irish). Both also recount how a migratory people was brought over to orthodox Christianity through the efforts of missionaries, and then acted as a vehicle (albeit an imperfect one) for the diffusion of the correct faith across the region. Both texts can therefore be considered geographically bounded ecclesiastical histories, in so far as they chart the arrival of Christianity in a specific former province of the Roman empire, and the gradual but still incomplete eradication of heresy within those regions. Each of them situates this localised history within a wider world-historical frame. Finally, each indulges in a degree of romanticism about the missionary past, and registers ambivalence about the moral condition of more recent times.

V

In the light of the foregoing discussion, let us finally consider the differences that modern scholarship has identified between Bede and Gregory of Tours as narrators of history. As we have seen, Gregory's diffuse narrative style has been contrasted with Bede's tightly focused account; Gregory's preoccupation with the local politics and confessional life of Tours and Clermont has been distinguished from Bede's tendency to keep

143. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, p. xxi.

144. On the importance of the *Angli* as one among the gentile nations, see Tugène, 'L'histoire "ecclesiastique"; and, in a wider context, G. Molyneux, 'Did the English Really Think They Were God's Elect in the Anglo-Saxon Period?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lxxv (2014), pp. 721–37.

145. *HEV*, 9–11.

Wearmouth–Jarrow at arm’s length. If we compare Bede’s work with the six-book ‘B’ recension of the *Historiae*, however, these differences become rather less stark. Regardless of the redactor’s intentions, Bede would have found in the ‘B’ text a story less cluttered by the local politics of Tours and Clermont, or by Gregory’s overbearing concern to promote his extended family, and more tightly focused on the origins of the Gallic Church, its *entente* with its newly Christianised Frankish rulers, and the resulting triumph of orthodoxy across the region. What is more, these latter themes would have seemed all the more prominent within the text in the absence of Books VII to X, which would have been much harder to read as an account of the realisation of orthodox Christianity within Gaul.

In his 1975 Jarrow Lecture, Robert Markus argued that Gregory’s work helped Bede to imagine how a Eusebian Church history could be adapted to the political fragmentation of the post-Roman era, a context that demanded a more thorough treatment of conflict among kings than Eusebius had been willing to record.¹⁴⁶ However, Gregory’s plurality of focus in the later books of the *Historiae* persuaded Markus that his work could not have been an adequate model for Bede: he characterised it as ‘a medley, in which first a stretch of ecclesiastical, then a predominantly national history with ecclesiastical episodes included in it, are grafted onto what began as a chronicle’.¹⁴⁷ But it was precisely this ‘stretch’ of ecclesiastical history that was accentuated in the ‘B’ redaction. Bede’s encounter with the ‘B’ redaction, probably after 725, may therefore have been crucial in providing him with a framework within which to place the historical materials that he had been assembling for decades.

Of course, there are still important differences between the ‘B’ recension of Gregory’s *Historiae* and Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Bede was far too independently minded to allow any one model to overwhelmingly influence his style or method. And there were real differences between the political geographies of sixth-century Gaul and seventh-century Britain: specifically, no single ruling dynasty held a monopoly on power in Britain, meaning that Bede had no reason to bemoan fratricidal discord in the way that Gregory did in the preface to Book V. The two texts are nonetheless similar in their choice of subject matter and their broad narrative arcs. As we have seen, the ‘B’ recension of the *Historiae* amounts to a geographically bounded Church history which hybridises Eusebius’s vision of ecclesiastical progress with Jerome’s pessimism about moral decline following the victory of the Church. This summary would apply equally well to Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*.

It is clear, and has never been disputed, that Bede knew the *Historiae* of Gregory of Tours in some form. Through a consideration of the

¹⁴⁶ Markus, *Bede*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

manuscript tradition of the *Historiae*, an evaluation of the evidence for Bede's knowledge of that text, and a sustained comparison of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* with the 'B' recension of the *Historiae*, this article has proposed a reappraisal of Bede's debt to the Gallic predecessor whom he knew as *Georgius*. In certain respects, that debt has been overstated: the foregoing discussion has demonstrated that it was extremely unlikely that Bede had read the *Historiae* in the ten-book version left by Gregory. In another sense, however, Bede may have owed far more to continental precedents than is usually allowed. Although it cannot be proven decisively, I have proposed that the shape and narrative arc of Bede's own work owed itself to the six-book recension to which he had access. This shorter history, styled '*historia ecclesiastica*' in at least some manuscripts, offered a ready template for the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* that Bede ultimately produced.

Bede's originality as a historian has often been thought to rest in his ingenious adaptation of the genre of Church history to the demands of describing the coming of Christianity to a particular post-Roman territory. This supposition fails to acknowledge the historiographic renaissance that was already underway in the post-Roman west.¹⁴⁸ In the late sixth and early seventh centuries, two Gallic scholars—Gregory of Tours and his posthumous redactor—had already been experimenting with reworking the Eusebian tradition to produce a new kind of Church history in the context of a politically fragmented post-Roman world. The redactor had created a variant on Gregory's original that shared much with the work that Bede went on to compose. This hypothesis invites us not to disparage Bede's accomplishments as an historian, but rather to place them more appropriately in a cross-Channel context. The adaptation of Roman genres of historiography to meet the needs of a radically changed world presented a serious intellectual challenge for early medieval writers. It was overcome not by the efforts of a lone authorial genius, but by a sustained (and uncelebrated) network of historians, redactors and copyists operating across the post-Roman west.

All Souls College, University of Oxford

JOHN MERRINGTON[®]

148. See Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 243–5.